

TESTIMONY OF  
CONGRESSMAN W.J. "BILLY" TAUZIN

SUBCOMMITTEE ON WATER RESOURCES & ENVIRONMENT  
HOUSE TRANSPORTATION & INFRASTRUCTURE COMMITTEE

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Mr. Chairman, what would be the response of the Corps of Engineers, the EPA, and the FBI if someone destroyed over 1900 square miles of wetlands?

I can tell you what happened in the case of U.S. v. Lambert Inc. The President of the company was sentenced to a \$20,000 fine, one year in jail, two years of probation, and had to deed five acres of land to the State of New Hampshire for a park because he impacted seven acres of wetlands.

Or, just over in Maryland, what happened when Mr. James Wilson was threatened with years in jail and multi-million dollar fines for placing dirt on top of 2.5 acres of land that the Corps previously rejected as jurisdictional wetlands. Mr. Wilson racked up nearly \$6 million in legal fees before he won in the Supreme Court of the United States.

How about another question? How do you think the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service would respond if someone destroyed hundreds of square miles of "critical habitat" (as defined in the Endangered Species Act) for the piping plover, gulf sturgeon, or kemp ridley sea turtle? I can tell you what they tried to do to a farmer in California when he created a fire break when his home was threatened by a fire. The federal government tried to put him in jail for three years and fine him \$300,000.

Mr. Chairman, Louisiana loses up to 35 square miles of coastal wetlands annually. We lost nearly 2000 square miles of land over the last century – 2000 square miles. That is almost 1.3 million acres – all of it wetlands – much of it critical habitat.

What has been the response of the federal government? Nothing.

Our state has an estimated 40% of the coastal wetlands in the lower 48, but it has been predicted that we experience up to 90% of the coastal wetlands loss.

I think the committee recognizes our extraordinary situation in Louisiana and I want to thank you for that. As a matter of fact, 70 of the 74 members of this committee and 33 of the 35 members of this subcommittee voted in support of providing hundreds of millions of dollars in mandatory, annual funding to restore coastal Louisiana. Many of you have voted for it two or three times. In the 106<sup>th</sup> Congress, nearly three-fourths of this House voted in support of mandatory funding for coastal Louisiana. Unfortunately, each of these efforts has died in the Senate, or, is currently subject to a filibuster in the other body.

The reason the members of this committee supported funding for coastal Louisiana was

not only because they understood the extraordinary merits of our coastal crisis, but because they also wisely understood the impact on their own constituents.

The members of this committee understood that coastal Louisiana is responsible for 20% of the energy used by this great nation. In fact, it is estimated that 64% of all of the oil, gas, and coal produced on federal lands or waters in the United States is produced in offshore Louisiana.

The members of this committee are aware that their constituents would not stand for paying an additional \$2 to \$3 per gallon of gasoline, as predicted by economist should LA1 and coastal Louisiana's precious resources and infrastructure continue to degrade.

This committee knows that Louisiana has the largest port system in the world. We are home to five of the biggest 12 ports in the country. Over 36 states depend on the maritime commerce on Louisiana's waterways to receive goods and services, and without coastal restoration, the Gulf Intracoastal Waterway and other navigation channels will be destroyed and your constituents will be paying more for goods at the stores in nearly all 50 states.

The members of this committee understand that Louisiana produces more blue crabs, oysters, crawfish, Omega 3 fish oil, and shrimp – the most consumed seafood in the country – than any other state. You understand that nearly 98% of the species in the Gulf of Mexico depends on Louisiana's coastal ecosystem to survive. Louisiana produces more seafood than any other state in the lower 48.

Our state is the "bottom" of the third largest watershed in the world – the Mississippi River system. This river system drains 42% of the contiguous land mass of North America or two-thirds of the United States – everything between the Rockies and the Appalachians.

Mr. Chairman, this committee understands that we must work to reduce and eliminate the 9000 square mile oxygen-depleted dead zone that appears off our coast annually – created from fertilizers and run off in the upper watershed.

And, the committee understands that Louisiana has some of the fastest subsidence rates in the world – eight times faster than the worldwide average. We have coastal areas that are sinking at an average rate of three feet per century.

Just recently, the Congress altered the way the National Flood Insurance Program operates. This committee has some jurisdiction over the program. These changes prohibit NFIP coverage on the homes of some of my constituents that have repetitive losses. However, every one to two miles of coastal wetlands reduces storm surge by one foot. Some of the same storm surges that hit our state years ago – causing virtually no flooding – would put over 20 feet of water in the city of New Orleans today.

The Congress, and members of this committee, supported these changes to the NFIP to prohibit expenditure for repetitive losses, but the Congress has done virtually nothing to stop the destruction of wetlands and "critical habitat" on our coast.

Our delegation is asking you for a lot of money this year. But, before I talk about those numbers, I want to share with you one more statistic.

\$130 billion. That is the amount of money offshore oil and gas production in the Gulf of Mexico has provided to the federal government. Let me put Louisiana's role in perspective for you – we produce up to 90% of that offshore Louisiana.

In 2001, Louisiana's offshore produced over \$5 billion in revenues to the federal government in oil and gas royalties – this is the second largest source of revenues to the federal treasury behind taxes.

That same year, the states of New Mexico and Wyoming provided about \$950 million from mineral production on federal lands within those states. Though Louisiana provided over five and a half times the revenue for the federal government than that of Wyoming and New Mexico, those states received \$550 million in revenue sharing from the federal government – or over 18 times the \$30 million in revenues shared with the state of Louisiana.

While the Louisiana Coastal Area language the House included in the WRDA bill was current two and a half years ago, much has changed as we have awaited Senate action on the bill. The Corps of Engineers recently released a new report which proposes up to \$2 billion in authorizations over the next several years.

We are going to ask you to authorize implementation of the elements identified in the Corps report. There will be six major components of the authorization:

1) A multi-agency task force comprised of agencies that have a stake in coastal Louisiana.

The Secretaries of: the Army, Interior, Commerce, Agriculture, Transportation, Energy, Homeland Security, the Administrator of the Environmental Protection Agency, and the Governor of the State of Louisiana.

2) Research and development

3) Demonstration projects

4) Planning, engineering, and design

5) Modifications to existing programs to ensure efficient use of taxpayer dollars, and

6) Construction authorization

Our request will include the authority to allow for identified components to begin construction with strong oversight from the Congress.

We are risking our economic security and independence by increasing our reliance on volatile political environments in the Middle East and South America. The United States has the most environmentally sound production techniques and requirements in the world. Over 4500 of the world's 7400 offshore platforms are in the Gulf of Mexico. Louisiana has embraced oil and gas production. We are willing to provide energy to this great nation.

If the states of New York, New Jersey, Connecticut, New Hampshire, Massachusetts, Maine, and Vermont are going to continue to use 22 times more energy than they are going to produce, then we are going to have to protect and restore coastal Louisiana.

Some may think this is a regional, state or even parochial problem. Before you make that determination, I encourage you to think about the response of your constituents when their energy costs skyrocket, when the price of seafood multiplies, and when businesses cannot export

their products to international markets.

This is not a Cajun issue or a Louisiana issue. This is a national issue – one with severe economic and national security implications. Every citizen of this nation benefits from Louisiana's natural resources; it is in all of our best interest to preserve this national treasure.